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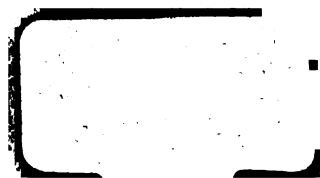
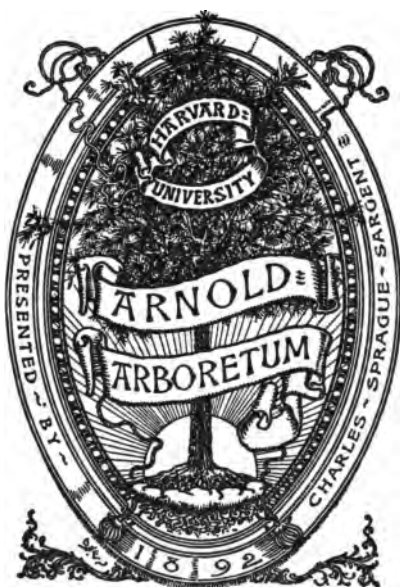
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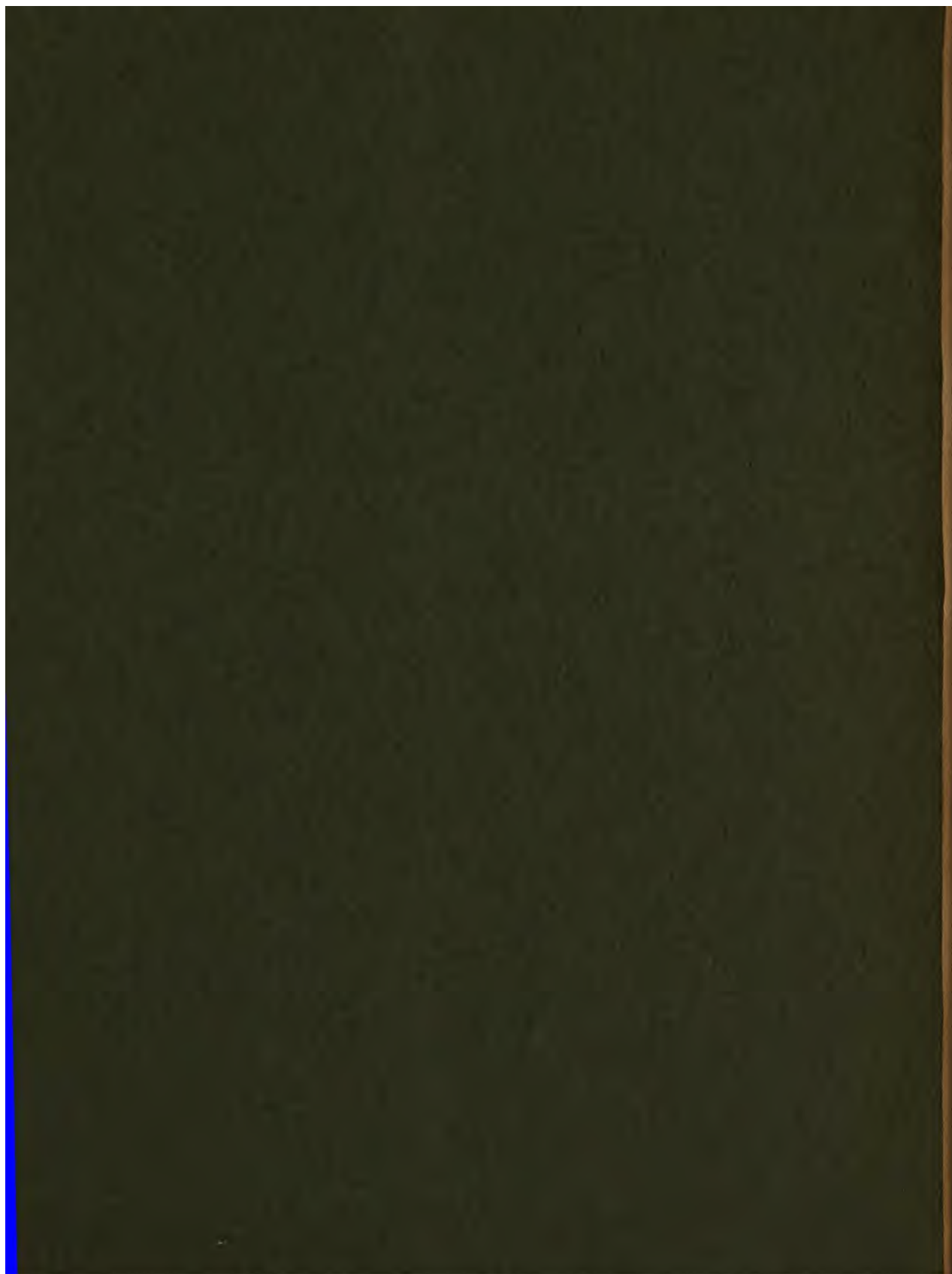


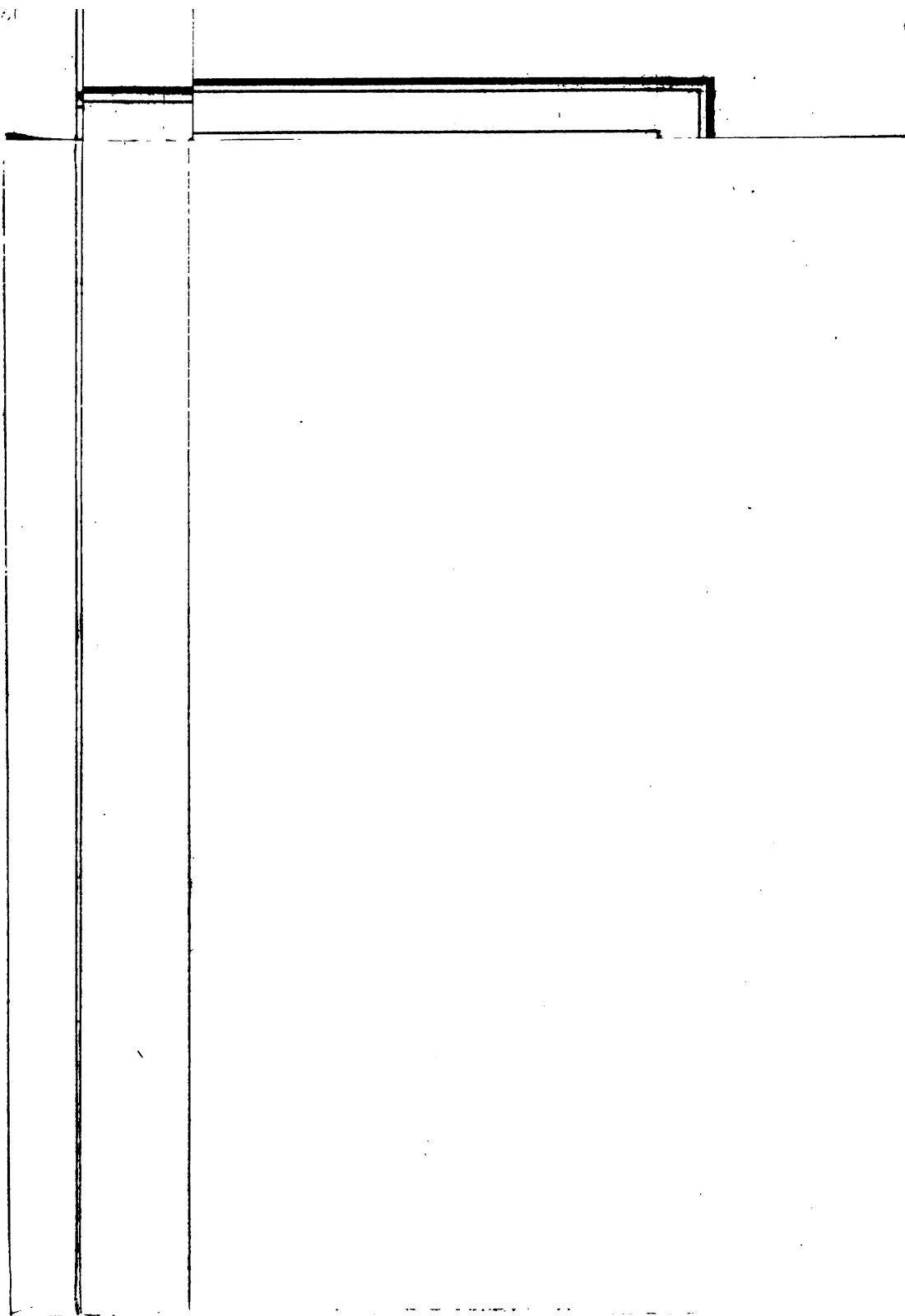


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—BEARDSLEY PARK—

* Preliminary Report *





CITY OF BRIDGEPORT. PARK COMMISSION.

BEARDSLEY PARK.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS'

PRELIMINARY REPORT.

SEPTEMBER, 1884.

F.L. and J.C. Olmsted.

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BEARDSLEY PARK.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS' REPORT.

To Park Commissioners

W. H. NOBLE,
P. T. BARNUM,
ALBERT EAMES,
W. H. PERRY.

SIRS,—Since you took us into counsel, three years ago, we have frequently visited the Beardsley farm, and have given the question of the city's interest in the premises careful study. The object of the present report will be to outline a general proposition for carrying into effect the engagement that has been made with Mr. Beardsley, and to submit the same with such explanations as will serve to bring the matter before you in a form for practical discussion.

A public park, as the term will be used in this report, means a provision by which certain forms of recreation may be made available to people ordinarily engaged in confining occupations, or who are otherwise subject to special strains under conditions of life peculiar to cities. To the enjoyment of these special forms of recreation, large spaces of ground are necessary, and suitable provisions for them are not to be expected from private enterprise. The use of them has been found a means of health, vigor, moral nurture and

commercial prosperity. They require a period of growth as well as of construction, consequently must be planned and prepared in advance of popular demand.

It happens that in many grounds called parks, provisions may be found for purposes not necessary to public health ; to which a large body of land is not essential, and which might be matters of efficient commercial supply. The economy of public parks lies chiefly in a clear separation between purposes that are necessarily distinctive of them, and purposes that are not so. It is questionably economical for a city to enter into a competition with taverns, beer-gardens, shows, circuses, museums, and race-grounds. It is unquestionably economical for it to prepare intelligently and with great care for such recreation, not otherwise to be obtained, as is necessary to the maintenance in health of the faculties of men working in masses under conditions of confined residence.

Public parks of the class thus defined are now generally recognized as a part of the necessary equipment of a city. Preparation for them in advance is a part of the duty of government in every growing town, and more especially in every town inviting a commercial and manufacturing population.

With such an understanding of the term as has thus been suggested, the existing park provisions of Bridgeport may be examined.

SEA-SIDE PARK

has for its distinguishing feature a system of driving and walking courses from which, on one side, can be enjoyed the sea breeze and an outlook upon the Sound, and, on the other, a pleasing, though, from the narrowness of the site, necessarily a contracted, view of turf, trees, and flowers. As it stands,

it is a capital place for a drive or walk, and for meeting gay company somewhat upon a parlor footing. It is simply a question of expense and good taste, how much its character in this respect shall be improved in the future by additional decorations of flowers, monuments, statues, fountains, and other garden furniture. There is no park in the country that meets the purpose of a fine dressy promenade as well or as cheaply as Seaside Park may be made to do.

These are its advantages and they are valuable.

People of certain conditions, tastes and habits, may want nothing more to be publicly provided. But no one can suppose that to the mass of busy townsmen, especially of a large manufacturing town, the most valuable sort of park recreation is offered in such a place.

Looking, then, to that class of park recreation that may be sufficiently distinguished by the term rural, and which, through influences on the imagination, acts counteractively to the ordinary strains of city life, the site of Sea Side Park will be found narrow, flat, low, and nearly associated with the traffic, bustle, and noise of the city streets, and the commerce of the harbor. Though called a park, it can never be much more than a garden on a large scale. No outlay, however lavish, will give it landscape charms or sylvan seclusion. It will never be a popular playground.

A sensible man of business, undertaking to frame a permanent and complete arrangement for the park recreation of Bridgeport, would say, "This is good as far as it goes, but it must be supplemented by provisions that can only be made economically on a very different piece of ground."

What is first of all wanted is land having advantages for surrounding visitors to it, with conditions of pleasing scenery of a character as different as possible from that which can be

provided elsewhere in or about the town; as, for example, upon small public places or on private properties, and by private enterprise, working through builders and florists.

In short, the want of Bridgeport is a simple, rural park, carefully guarded from incongruities and disturbances, especially those of an elegant urban character. The object of simply cheapening ordinary beer-garden, hot-house, or flower-bed recreations, should be rigidly shut out.

Taking this view of what is and what is not desirable, let the ground be examined that is now held by the city as a site for a park for future use.

THE SITE FOR BEARDSLEY PARK

compared with the Sea-side ground, is elevated, broad, of diversified surface, and naturally of a pastoral, sylvan, and idyllic aspect. Though it commands a distant view of the sea, its best and most characteristic outlook is over a great landscape in the opposite direction. Except when broken by ledges of rock, the modelling of its surface is large, simple, and graceful, and the out-cropping ledges present valuable elements and opportunities for producing picturesque incidents.

There are considerable bodies of well-grown wood upon it; other bodies of choice and promising young growth, and several spreading and umbrageous single trees, years ago cleared about and preserved by Mr. Beardsley because of their distinctive beauty. It is thoroughly rural, and just such a country-side as a family of good taste and healthy nature would resort to, if seeking a few hours' complete relief from scenes associated with the wear and tear of ordinary town life. It is just the place for a day's outing. It is a better picnic ground than any possessed by the city of New York, after

spending twenty million dollars for parks. In all these respects, it supplies what is chiefly lacking in the site of Sea-side Park.

The object of any public outlay upon it should be to develop and bring out these distinctive local advantages, and make them available to extensive use in the future by large numbers of people.

We submit for your consideration a preliminary plan having this purpose and no other in view. This plan covers more ground than is now possessed by the city, because the annexation of certain pieces of adjoining land, of little present value for any other purpose than that of a park, will add greatly to the value of that held by the city.

THE SCHEME OF THE PARK.

The first thing to be considered is that the extent of level ground available for the proposed park is limited. The site is chiefly a series of rather steep hill sides. Such space of plain surface as it offers should be spread open and as little as possible disturbed or divided by trees, roads, walks, or any manner of constructions. If games like croquet and lawn tennis are to be allowed on the park, this space at the best will not be found permanently large enough. It will be inadequate for such a parade of children as is made every year on Brooklyn Park, even though but a quarter as many children should have part in it. It will be cramped and subject to excessive wear if freely used as a base ball ground by the boys of the public schools. This is one reason why we have extended the plan over an adjoining field, which offers a larger plain of turf than any within the site as originally defined.

The carriage roads shown on the plan are not designed to be in competition as pleasure drives with those of Sea-Side Park. Considering its hill-side character, Beardsley Park is not large enough to allow an extended pleasure drive to be laid out within it. The roads proposed are designed only to give access to different parts of it, for people who wish to use it for other purposes than driving, and to offer a pleasant passage through it for those who wish to take a longer drive. The country beyond is very attractive. At one point on the park only is it contemplated that carriages will throng. This is on the summit of Walker's Hill, and here a broad place is prepared for them.

The plan contemplates no other important constructions, and no simply ornamental works whatever. Beyond the points stated, its purposes may be almost wholly comprehended in a few particulars, as follows :

1. Some of the borders of the park, where the ground is now naked and bleak, are proposed to be planted with trees and underwood, in order to obtain more genial effects, and secure greater rural seclusion.
2. A few points on the hill-sides near ledges are also to be planted ; if left in turf they would, in dry weather, appear scorched, poverty-stricken and dreary, while, by suitable planting, they will be picturesque and refreshing.
3. Umbrageous trees are to be scattered along the edges of the open turf spaces to supply shade and avoid monotony of outlines.
4. The woods, generally, are to be gradually thinned out ; opened by glades and thrown into groups, and the trees

selected to remain are to be shortened in, and suitably pruned, with a view to their gaining renewed vigor, and growing into more beautiful forms and foliage compositions.

5. The young wood on the lower part of Walker's Hill is to be similarly treated, but with a view, generally, to a more spreading and park-like character.

6. Fine views are to be had from the upper part of Walker's Hill, especially to the northward, eastward, and southward. This will also be the breeziest part of the park. For these reasons it will be a resort for picnics, and much used for family tea-parties, while, as before suggested, the ridge of the hill is likely to be thronged at times by people coming to enjoy the distant views. To keep these views open, and secure considerable spaces of unbroken turf, few *trees* can be allowed to grow in the upper part of the hill. The scenery will, however, be greatly improved, and the danger of injury to it by the introduction, by-and-by, of buildings or other incongruous objects on the neighboring ground, outside of the park, much lessened by strong plantations along the base of the hill, and especially on the long slope between the top of the hill and the outer end of Noble Avenue. A plantation here will also add much to the landscape character of the park, and to the character of its entrance. The land in question (the Thompson lot) does not belong to the city, and is one of the tracts recommended to be added to the site.

7. At the north end of the proposed carriage concourse on Walker's Hill, there is a prominent, smooth-topped ledge, upon which people standing will have before them a rarely beautiful prospect,—the finest from the park. Their view of it will range over the tops of carriages on the concourse.

No similar advantage is to be found for people on foot at the south end of the concourse, but as there is, near by, an abundance of boulders suitable for the purpose, it is proposed that the wheel-way shall here be sustained by a wall of rock on the hill-side, taking the form of a terrace, and that, at a point corresponding to the natural outlook at the north end, a structure shall be made, also of boulders, adapted to serve the same end. Upon this a flag-staff would be placed. Seen in connection with the terrace wall below, though formed of local material, without dressing, and laid up without mortar, and though in no respect imitative or sham work, it would have the effect of the bastion of an ancient fortification on the hill top, and when partly overgrown by vines and rock plants, would be an interesting object not out of keeping with the general rural character of the park.

This look-out bastion would be the only structure on the park intentionally conspicuous. Convenience would probably require a cabin near by at which hot water, milk, and some other conveniences could be obtained by picnickers. Closets and retiring houses for women will also be required at other points, and a range of stabling, sheds, and a superintendency. The most suitable positions for these can be better determined when the question of a revision of the boundaries of the site has been settled. They should be as secluded and unnoticeable as possible, consistently with convenience.

8. The park will need certain work of agricultural improvement, more especially with the object of establishing firm, elastic and lasting turf, and a healthy growth of plants. There should not be a single flower bed in it, and, above all, no exhibition of foliage plants, or of exotic and horticultural

curiosities. But in large parts a profuse growth should be secured of native and other thoroughly hardy and perennial and self-propagating flowering plants, such as violets, gentians, asters, and golden rod, and, upon the rocky parts, creepers, sedums, and mosses.

ADDITIONS TO THE SITE.

The need of additional level ground for games has been stated. A suitable field for the purpose, which would be in direct extension of the line of small play-grounds provided on the site as it exists, will be found immediately north of it. It is better ground for the purpose than any now held by the city.

The reason for advising the addition of the several other strips and patches shown on the plan, is to be found in the fact that land, situated as these several pieces are, is apt to be used after a while for purposes of private gain that may be advanced by a conspicuous display, serving as an advertisement to people frequenting the park. Such displays, even if not offensive and demoralizing, as in the case of a certain class of dram-shops and taverns is liable to be the case, are extremely out of place in the midst of a preserve of rural scenery. On the other hand the scenery of the park will be greatly improved by such plantations as the plan proposes upon the ground in question.

The most important proposition in this respect is that of the acquisition, by the city, of the narrow strip between the public road and the pond on the west side of the site. The land is mainly a declivity, densely wooded, and unsuitable to build upon. If it remains in private hands it may be easily so used as to completely destroy the rural character of at least a

The plan suggests a station on the railroad, on the west side of the river, giving entrance to sylvan walks, one of which would lead directly to the northern play-ground.

Presuming that a street railway will be made between the city and the southern entrance to the park on the east side, visitors would find it convenient to enter at one of these points, walk the entire length of the park, and leave it at the other. The distance between the two is one mile.

MR. BEARDSLEY AND HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE UNDERTAKING.

In our studies of the ground we found many young trees that had from time to time for some years previously been planted upon it, and other evidences of some scheme for its improvement. It was due to Mr. Beardsley that any such scheme that he had formed should not be thoughtlessly set aside. For this reason we sought his personal acquaintance. We have several times come upon him when engaged in his farmer's work, and have drawn him from it to go over the ground. In accounting for the position in which he had placed trees, for the trees that he had removed, for the position of fences, for purchases that he had made, roadways that he had opened, and other circumstances, Mr. Beardsley has not only explained such ideas of a plan of improvement as he had formed, but has unconsciously disclosed also the gradual growth in his mind of the purpose to give the land to the city. The germ of it appears to have been a simple enjoyment of the rural beauty of the neighborhood half of all the park. In its present wooded condition it adds greatly to its value, and it could be improved at little cost.

of his inherited homestead, and an impulse to welcome others to enjoy it with him.

Recognizing, as we were glad to do, that the place had natural advantages for supplying the most urgent want of Bridgeport, in respect of park provisions, we have had several occasions for pointing out to Mr. Beardsley wherein such planning as he had been proceeding upon failed to turn these advantages to good account, and would even in some degree annul them. He has always listened patiently to such observations, and latterly has more than once said: "The roads I have traced will be easily obliterated; the trees I have been planting are not yet too large to be well replanted. They may, therefore, be regarded as so much advanced nursery stock which I give the city with the land. I see reason in what you say, and I should be sorry if you did not pursue the course that your experience in parks recommends, without the slightest regard for any intentions or expectations that I may have had."

We have pursued no other course, and Mr. Beardsley will first see our plan in its printed form, and after it has passed into your hands. But we venture to say that few men, under similar circumstances, would have so gracefully yielded their own notions of a plan— notions which they had had for years more or less in mind, and had been working upon; and we believe that this incident exemplifies the motives by which in all this affair he has been governed.

The founder of Beardsley Park is not known as the head of great commercial enterprises, nor does he stand among our great capitalists and gentlemen of leisure. He holds no public station. He maintains a simple farm-house manner of private life, and is to-day a man of toilsome though cheerful manual industry. As the world goes it will be to the

honor of the citizens of Bridgeport, if his distinction in this respect shall not obscure the fact that his gift to them and their posterity, in so far as it represents public spirit, pride of home, and a liberal and benevolent mind, is one of equal rank with such celebrated public benefactions as those of Girard College, the Astor Library, Cooper Institute, Cornell and Johns Hopkins Universities, and the Barnum Museum of Tufts College. It will be to the lasting fame of Bridgeport, if the high purpose of Mr. Beardsley shall be heartily seconded and made thoroughly, permanently, and conspicuously successful.

Respectfully,

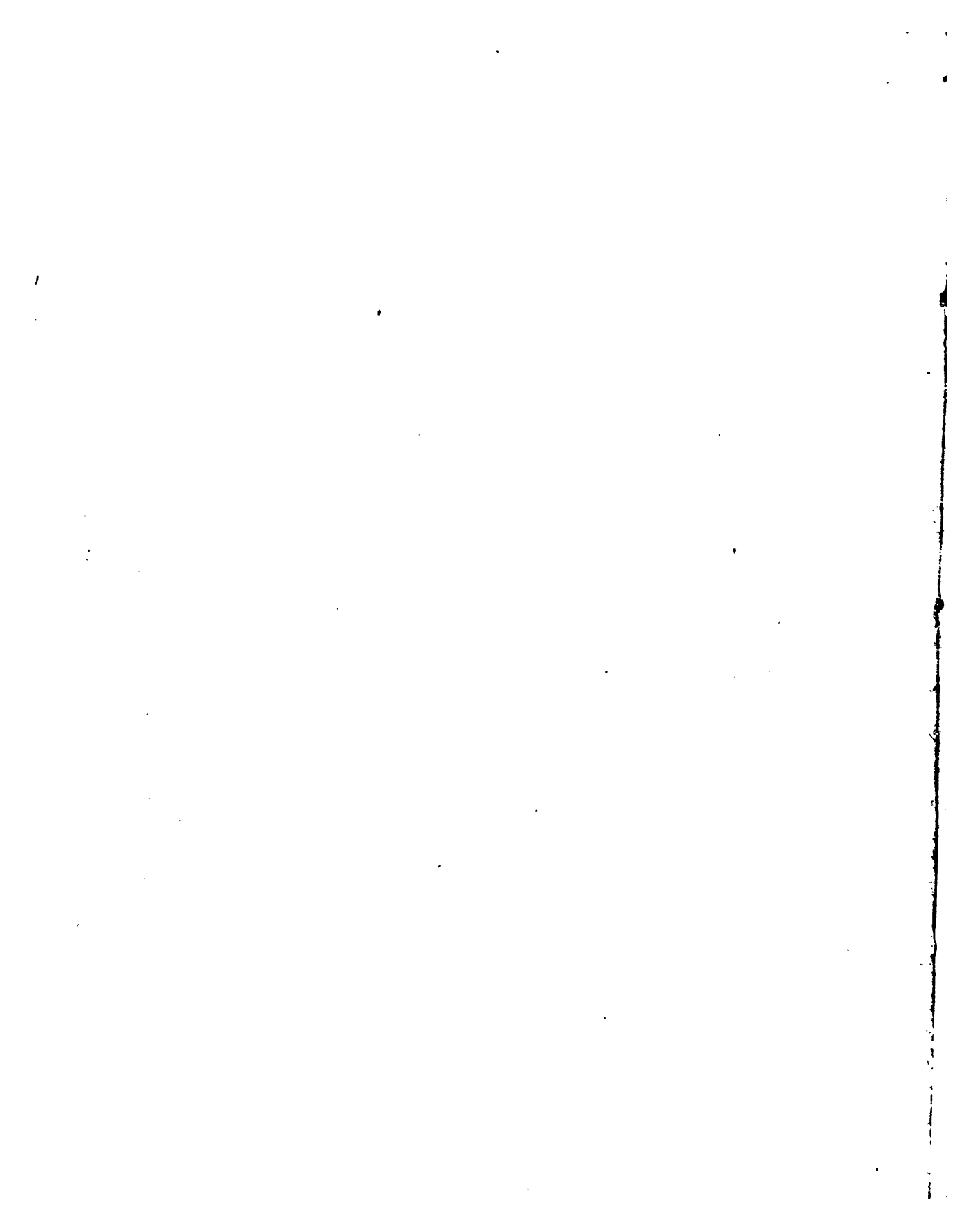
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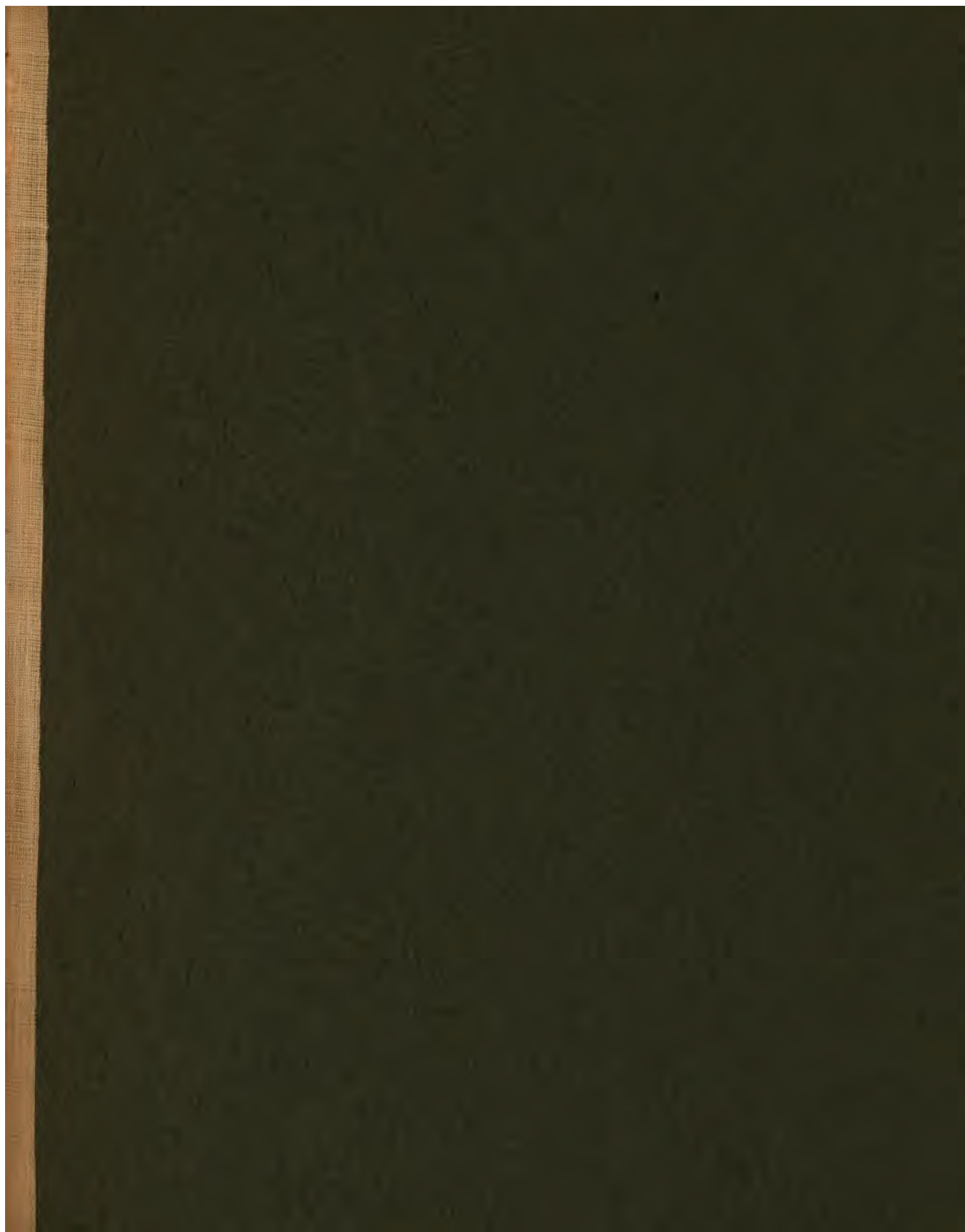
J. C. OLMSTED,

Landscape Architects.

BROOKLINE, MASS.,

September, 1884.













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